

## Showtime film examined Texas dragging murder

LOS ANGELES (AP) - A legion of Black Panthers has come to march. An army of Klansmen is on its way. And 8,000 townspeople are struggling to squelch the racial furor that divides them as three white men head to trial for the violent killing of a black man.

This was the scene in the summer of 1998 in Jasper, Texas. It's also the powder-keg moment re-enacted in the Showtime docudrama "Jasper, Texas," about a community rocked and rent by tragedy yet showing amazing grace.

The film aired Sunday, a day after the fifth anniversary of the murder of James Byrd Jr., who was chained to the back of a pickup truck and dragged to his death.

"The challenge was to find the story, because real events don't necessarily represent the human story," says writer and executive producer Jonathan Estrin. "What I'm after is the emotional truth."

After several years of research and interviews with Jasper residents, Estrin uses the Byrd murder - including a subtle recreation of the dragging and archival footage of an outraged nation - as the backdrop for this portrait of a town divided. (Earlier this year, PBS aired the documentary "Two Towns of Jasper.")

The story centers on Sheriff Billy Rowles (Jon Voight) and R.C. Horn (Louis Gossett Jr.), Jasper's newly appointed and first black mayor, as they battle their personal demons

and outside agitators while attempting to maintain control of their community.

"Jasper is America ... it's really no different than many other parts of America," says Estrin.

"If this had happened in Los Angeles or New York there probably would have been riots or civil unrest. What surprised me, in many ways, is that these people came up against extraordinary circumstances and simply tried to do the right thing," Estrin says.

Doing the right thing meant openly talking about racism.

"What I saw in the story is a growth," says Gossett. "The whole world was watching them and it made the mayor grow up so he was not just a figurehead mayor. It made the sheriff look into his past. It brought the whole town into the 21st century, in a sense, to consider issues nobody had spoken about."

The prosecutor won two death sentences and one life sentence for Byrd's killers. And though the mayor and sheriff led the town, it was Byrd's family that set the emotional tone for the entire region.

"These were the people who held it all together," Voight says. "It was their strength, and the way that they dealt with it, that produced an uplifting of that entire community."

"Through it all, I wanted peace," says Stella Byrd, the victim's mother. "There was

no need of someone else going through what I'm going through now. We said we wanted peace and let justice be done by the law enforcement."

Mrs. Byrd - who wrote the book "Hope in the Midst of Despair, A Grieving Mother Speaks" - still lives in Jasper where racial attitudes have been "a little bit better" since the incident. But, she contends, "I never did have any problems with racism myself."

The Byrds have established the James Byrd Jr. Foundation for Racial Healing, which works closely with organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and Southern Poverty Law Center to educate the public regarding racism.

"It's always enlightening to hear questions from the young people," says James Byrd's sister, Mary Verett, "such as: How do you move on? Why don't you hate them? (I tell them) it's about faith, and it's something you don't just get overnight."

"It was a horrible, heinous crime. We will never get over it," adds Verett, who lives in Houston. "But we become their next victims if we do not find a way to move on. Our faith helped us to do that."

But the emotional scars ran deep on the set. "Many times I broke down and cried and had to go back to my trailer," says director Jeff Byrd.

Coincidentally, the Los (See *Dragging*, Page 11)

## Judge: R. Kelly can't go to L.A. to film music video

CHICAGO (AP) - R. Kelly, free on bond since he was indicted on 21 child pornography charges, cannot go to Los Angeles to film a music video, but can travel to attend the BET Awards and perform at an upcoming concert, a judge has ruled.

The 36-year-old R&B singer hasn't been allowed to leave the Chicago area without a judge's permission since he was indicted June 5, 2002. The charges stem from a videotape purportedly showing him having sex with an underage girl. Kelly has denied the charges.

The Grammy-winning performer had sought to travel to Los Angeles to produce a video for a song off of an upcoming album. But Cook County Judge Vincent Michael Gaughan said Kelly's attorneys presented no argument why he couldn't produce a video with technology and creative resources in Chicago, where Kelly's from.

Gaughan did allow Kelly, whose first name is Robert, to travel to Los Angeles for Black Entertainment Television's awards show on June 24; he is nominated in two categories. He was also given permission to go to Dallas for a charity concert for the families of soldiers injured or killed in the Iraq war.

Gaughan said barring Kelly from the awards show or the charity concert would

"do more harm than good."

A Kelly trip request last month prompted complaints by prosecutors, who have consistently opposed his travel. Kelly was granted his request to travel to New York to perform a concert, but prosecutors later discovered he was never listed as a performer.

Attorney Ed Genson said Kelly was waiting to sign a contract once he had the judge's permission. Kelly later withdrew from the show, Genson said.

Genson, in court Wednesday, said barring Kelly from travel limited his ability to make a living. Cook County assistant state's attorney Ellen Mandeltort argued that Kelly's success is important only to his record company, Jive Records.

Kelly attended the hearing but remained silent.

The singer has been the focus of at least four civil lawsuits, three involving sex with underage girls. He was also arrested in Florida in January on separate child pornography charges.

No trial date has been set for the Illinois child pornography indictment. If convicted, Kelly could face 15 years in prison and a \$100,000 fine.

Despite his legal troubles, Kelly, also a songwriter and producer, remains a popular figure. His latest album, "Chocolate Factory," has sold 1.7 million copies.

## Joyner promotes black theatre festival

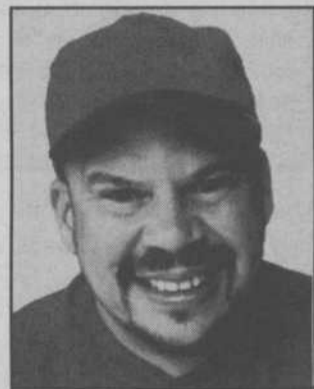
WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (AP) - Tom Joyner, one of the nation's top-rated radio personalities, plans to help promote the National Black Theatre Festival.

Joyner, the host of the popular syndicated radio program "The Tom Joyner Morning Show," is scheduled to broadcast live from Joel Coliseum Aug. 8.

In addition to promoting the festival, Joyner will raise money for Livingstone College, a historically black college in Salisbury.

Larry Leon Hamlin, the founder and organizer of the festival that began in 1989, said he expected 6,000 to 8,000 fans of Joyner's show to attend the festival because of the live broadcast.

Known as the Sky Show, it features live musical per-



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formances and comedians.

In the past, such rhythm-and-blues acts as Rick James and The Gap Band have performed.

The national exposure that the festival will get from being connected with Joyner's show will also make it easier to attract advertisers, Hamlin said.

"We may get a larger

crowd than we're even expecting," Hamlin said. "He's a powerful presence for African-Americans. He's a major power figure to be associated with the Black Theatre Festival."

Joyner's show, a mix of talk and comedy, is syndicated in 101 markets and reaches 5 million listeners each week.



FAME Outreach and Community Development Corp. (FOCDC), presented an afternoon of elegance on May 10th at the new Ritz Carlton Hotel in Lake Las Vegas. High Tea was served at 2:00 in the afternoon, which included an array of bite size sandwiches, scones and sweets along with hot savory tea.

In this beautiful setting, committee members and their guests, including several potential debutantes for our 2004 "YOUNG LADIES OF DISTINCTION SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS PROGRAM AND COTILLION," enjoyed great food and a wonderful program, honoring mothers through poems and songs.

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The next scheduled event, "CHURCH LADY HATS" and "FASHION EXTRAVAGANZA," will be held on Sunday, July 20th at 3:00 in the afternoon. Light lunch will be served. Additional events will be held at various times throughout the year.

We are now accepting applications for our scholarship and awards program and cotillion. Young ladies between the ages of 16 and 18, with a GPA of 2.5 or above are encouraged to apply. This is a wonderful, in-depth program where we feel that each young lady benefits greatly.

For applications or ticket information, please contact FOCDC Secretary Barbara Beasley at (702) 649-1774 or E-mail at [info@FAMEchurchLV.org](mailto:info@FAMEchurchLV.org). FOCDC is a branch of First African Methodist Church where Rev. Spencer F. Barrett is pastor.